

Our Review of Reviews.

British Stamps with Overprints.

"The Status of British Stamps Applied to Special Uses" is the title given by Mr. C. F. Dendy Marshall, B.A., to a most interesting article he contributes to the "London Philatelist."

The question (he writes) as to whether a particular class of stamps should be collected or not, as an adjunct to the regular issue, is usually a matter of some considerable subtlety, and one which each collector must decide for himself. Among too many philatelists there is a tendency to make a kind of fetish of the lists in dealers' catalogues, rather than to think for themselves. These lists are, excellent in their way, but are framed to suit all tastes, and therefore present rather an *omnium gatherum*.

The stamps of our country have been used in various ways other than by the general public at home. The fact of appropriation to special uses may be denoted:—

- (1) By an overprint.
- (2) By initials, etc., on the back.
- (3) By the same perforated through the stamp.
- (4) It may be only determined *post facto* by the postmark.
- (5) It may not be indicated at all, even when used.

After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that a collector of British stamps who either only takes unused, or who takes unused when obtainable, and fills up the blanks with used copies, should ignore stamps of limited use entirely, because they are quite unnecessary, setting aside the question of legality.

A complete unmarked collection represents and includes both the stamps in ordinary use and those in the above categories.

The case is completely altered where special stamps of different design are employed (Departmental U.S.A., for instance). There a collection of the normal stamps is not universally representative, as I maintain it is when they are merely overprinted. It is absurd to argue that having "Official" or some initials dabbed on a stamp makes it a different variety; one might as well say that a Hassocks postmark made the stamp different from one used at Brighton. The overprint merely denotes that the stamp is for a particular use; in fact, it is a kind of postmark.

Moreover, if the boundary is once overstepped, it is very difficult to draw the line and at the same time preserve a reputation of consistency.

Let us consider section 1, some of which are usually considered as worthy of a place in an unused collection, or were, until the hornets' nest was recently disturbed in official circles. I think I can show that to be consistent it is impossible to collect them without taking the others also.

This section includes—

(a) Stamps used for official postage, with seven different overprints, viz.—

- I. R. Official.
- Government Parcels.
- Admiralty Official.
- Army Official.
- Board of Education.
- R. H. Official.
- O. W. Official.

(b) Stamps used in England by a non-official body, which was nevertheless, permitted to have its initials printed on the stamps, namely, the Oxford Union Society (O.U.S.).

(c) Stamps with value altered for use in the Levant.

(d) Stamps used at certain places abroad, with five different overprints, viz.—

- British Bechuanaland (and Bechuanaland Protectorate).
- British East Africa Company.
- British Protectorate Oil Rivers.
- Cyprus.
- Zululand.

This is a pretty formidable list, but if you once accept the principle of collecting stamps of our country with overprints appropriating them to special uses, that is where you are landed, logically.

I will first justify this position, before proceeding to the other chief sections.

It will be granted that most people take (a) and (c), as per catalogue.

It is not consistent to take (a) and ignore (b), as is usually done, on the ground (I suppose) that (a) are used by official

bodies and (b) were not. It would only be so for a specialist in official stamps alone. The main portion of an ordinary collection consists of the stamps as used by private persons, hence it is not fair to draw a line between (a) and (b).

Again, if you take (c) why not also (d)? The use is quite analogous, it seems to me. Suppose the Levant stamps had the word "Levant" on them?

I will now turn to the principal headings.

Before the "O.W. Official" overprint came into use, the stamps used by the Office of Works were perforated with "O.W." and a Crown. Surely these are entitled to rank with their successors. The stamps are appropriated to a certain definite official use, and the same is indelibly marked upon them.

This opens the door to section 3. Applying the same argument I used in favour of 1 (b) (the O.U.S. stamps), lets in stamps perforated for use by different firms, a practice which is officially sanctioned. The predecessors of the latter came in section 2, which also includes the successors of 1 (b), namely, those with "O.U.S." on the back. (It is useless to try to draw a distinction by saying it does not show on the front, because I possess a used specimen of the last named, which has not been removed from the original paper, with "underprint" clearly showing through.)

With regard to section 4, we are at once confronted by the fact that we are dependent on the postmark, which on the unused stamp does not exist (or ought not to, though I have seen a stamp described, and priced, as unused, with a distinct postmark!).

This shows better than anything the absurdity of including these stamps for special purposes in an unused collection, or one which aims at being unused. Because at the British Post Offices in the Levant penny and other stamps are sold and used, but without the incident of altered currency. If you collect British stamps used in the Levant, these ought to be included, yet it is impossible to distinguish them except by the postmark.

And the same reasoning applies to other stamps under this head, namely stamps used in the Colonies before they had issues of their own; used at British Post Offices in South America; used by the army on active service; and on letters posted on the high seas. They happened to be content with the value as expressed on the stamps, but the use is perfectly analogous.

Section 5 is, of course, impossible to collect. It consists, among others, of stamps which rank with 1 (a) as regards conditions of use, namely, stamps used officially, but not overprinted; by Government Departments, the stamps of which are not identified.

I think anyone who admits the weight of the above arguments will agree that stamps of limited use are best left alone by the specialist in unused, on the grounds of consistency and expediency, not to mention legality.

In a used collection which is at all ambitious in its scope, though they are not essential, I think a few of each of the first four heads should be taken, in order to show the different conditions under which the stamps included in the collection are used, but I do not see any necessity for having a complete set of any of them; to do that is, to my mind, like wishing to have each stamp with every different postmark upon it: which brings me back to the statement I made previously, which, perhaps, may be more readily accepted after reading this article, namely, that the overprint is a kind of postmark. It is something added to the normal stamp, which does not make it a true variety, like a variation in design, colour, perforation, or paper, and consequently is not worthy of all the attention that has been bestowed upon it in the past.

Arise, Sir Philatelist!

Sir D. P. Masson, whose knighthood formed one of this year's Birthday Honours, is the "Notable Philatelist" of the July "Philatelic Record." His Kashmir handbook, duly noticed in the *Fortnightly* at the time of its publication, is one of the classics of Philately, and his collection of Kashmir stamps is without doubt the finest in the world. Some time ago Afghanistan succeeded Kashmir in his affection. Sir D. P. Masson is continually on the watch for novelties from Kabul; and is always the first to notify these to the philatelic Press. He is a successful banker, an ardent golfer, a Colonel of volunteers, and one of the keenest philatelists in the Anglo-Indian community.